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Fear Russ girding for germ war

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WASHINGTON — Soviet installation of military facilities at several pharmaceutical factories has caused United States intelligence analysts to suspect that Kremlin leaders are stockpiling germ-warfare weapons in violation of treaties, a House study has concluded.

The report, by the House Intelligence Oversight Subcommittee, disclosed the troubling evidence of Soviet germ war preparations in Siberia and elsewhere while investigating whether the Carter administration disclosed details of an anthrax epidemic in Siberia for political purposes.

As many as 1,000 persons died last year of the animal-borne disease when they inhaled anthrax germs that escaped from a laboratory in Sverdlovsk after a small explosion, U.S. officials disclosed recently.

DRAWING ON TOP-secret CIA reports and other classified data, the House subcommittee found that Sverdlovsk is only one of several sites where army units are now in place at pharmaceutical plants "known from open literature to have biological facilities."

The Biological Weapons Treaty of 1975 prohibits both the U.S. and Soviet military from stockpiling germwar weapons. The report pointed out that the U.S. has removed military units from its old germwar plants "in keeping with the letter and spirit" of the treaty.

Thus, "it is disturbing that the U.S.S.R. may have built military facilities at microbiological plants since the negotiation and signing of the convention," the committee report said.

THE DOCUMENT was released by Rep. Les Aspin [D., Wis.], who initiated the investigation to determine whether administration officials leaked intelligence reports about Sverdlovsk to punish the Soviets for invading Afghanistan. Making such political use of CIA data could reduce the agency's effectiveness, Aspin warned at the time.

Instead, the subcommittee found not only that the administration acted properly but also that the Russians' behavior over the Sverdlovsk incident raises questions about whether they would cheat on a nuclear arms treaty.

After the U.S. disclosed the accident, Soviet spokesmen insisted that the anthrax epidemic was caused by tainted meat in Sverdlovsk. But, Aspin's report indicated that the CIA found that the fatal anthrax was a rare form usually created in laboratories.

THE SVERDLOVSK victims inhaled the anthrax spores, whereas nearly all naturally occurring anthrax cases are caused by eating tainted food or touching the germs, the report said.

The only naturally occurring anthrax cases traced to inhaling the germs involve workers who shear infected sheep. "So," said Aspin, "when you have information that confirms numerous deaths in an urban area from inhalation anthrax, you know that somewhere along the line there was a man-made concentration of the spores that got into the air — or else the Soviets have a well-camouflaged sheep-shearing operation."

Aspin also questioned why the Soviets lied about the tainted meat when they could have simply said there was an accident involving germs being kept for peaceful research, which the treaty permits.

ASPIN, A LEADING congressional liberal, pointed out that the now-stalled Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty contains restrictions that could be difficult to verify for compliance, such as range of missiles and size of rockets.

"It may be that in the future only those arms-control agreements that are verifiable in the narrowest terms can be seriously considered," Aspin said. "The consequences of this would be grave."

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